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SUBJECT: NORTHERN GREEK FORMER MAYOR SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR ROLE IN
FACILITATING PROSTITUTION

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 11, the Thrace Appeals Court imposed prison sentences on the former mayor of Sapes (northeastern Greek Municipality of Rodopi) and three other people for their roles in the issuing of fraudulent documents to foreigners, some of whom were females involved in prostitution. Three members of the local police (including the head of the department at the time) have also been charged, but not yet tried. Thrace contacts say there is not yet any evidence that the case involved trafficking, but this possibility has not been ruled out. It is the first time, in post's knowledge, that an elected official has been prosecuted for a case involving prostitution or trafficking in northern Greece. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) According to Thrace police, in the summer of 2001, the municipal council of the town of Sapes (a small agricultural town in the northeastern Greek Prefecture of Rodopi) issued fraudulent documents to 173 foreign inhabitants of the area which helped them obtain residence permits. Some of the recipients were women offering sex services in a night club of a nearby village (Velkio). The case came to light when one of the women involved approached the prosecutor and told her story. On February 11 the court sentenced the owner of the club (G. Tsakiris) to nine years and 4 months imprisonment for pandering

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and bribery and the former mayor of the town (N. Haritopoulos) to two years imprisonment for "passive" bribery (being aware of bribery without reporting it) and breach of duty. Additionally, two other people were sentenced to 24 and 17 months respectively. All of those convicted are free pending appeal.

¶3. (SBU) The head of the local police department and two other policemen have also been charged in the case, but no date has been set for their trial. NGO and police contacts have informed post that the alleged role of the local police in the case is unclear and that details may not emerge before the trial. The trial will be closely watched since prosecution of law enforcement or government officials in Greece is extremely rare. NGO and other post contacts say they have seen no indications that the women involved in the case were victims of trafficking.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: To post's knowledge, this is the first time in northern Greece a mayor or other prominent elected official has been tried and convicted of involvement in prostitution or trafficking. The case is also notable because the convicted former mayor, Haritopoulos, is reportedly a close associate of opposition PASOK party leader, George Papandreou (who reportedly was Haritopoulos's best man and godfather of his son). Local post contacts expressed the hope that the case will mark the end of an era during which a combination of apathy and collusion allowed official corruption to flourish in Thrace. The expected trial of the police and its outcome will help determine further

whether this hope is justified. Post will continue to monitor the case, including efforts to ascertain whether it involved trafficking.

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